



APRIL 1966 MARKS THE OPENING of the first of 65 Interagency Boards of U.S. Civil Service Examiners. By December of this year, all 65 will be open for business. As they move into full operation, there will be a gradual elimination of the 668 existing single-agency boards of examiners.

What is an Interagency Board? Why is such a change taking place? How much of a change is it, after all, and how will it affect Federal agencies and prospective Federal employees?

These questions and many more are being asked throughout the Federal community, wherever there is interest in the quality and timeliness of staffing—in shipyards, arsenals, supply depots; in central, regional, and district headquarters; in scientific, medical, and technical research laboratories; and in all of the other enormously varied institutions and offices comprising the executive branch of the Government.

This article is designed to answer these questions and provide a glimpse of the future.

WHAT WE HAVE NOW

The great bulk (85 percent) of all career appointments in the competitive civil service are made from examinations conducted by boards of examiners. Each board is made up of officials of the agency establishment, although a few "joint" boards have members from several establishments. The work of the boards in announcing examinations, evaluating applicants, establishing lists of eligibles in rank order, certifying eligibles for agency consideration in filling jobs, etc., is carried out by a typically part-time staff, employees of the "host" agency. (Only 11 percent of the boards have enough workload to warrant full-time executive secretaries.)

The basic idea of having civil service examinations conducted by boards of examiners is fundamental to the Federal civil service system. The Civil Service Act of 1883 contemplated that examining would be done by boards of agency employees established by the Commission, but that such examinations would be under the control of the Commission. In the early days of the civil service system, this was the method used. The Commission had no staff and all examining was done through boards. By 1890, we were in trouble. Examining backlogs built up; the boards were not being adequately staffed. As a result, the Commission gradually sought appropriations and built up its own professional corps of examiners.

Over the next 40 or 50 years, the proportion of examining workload performed by Commission staff in relation to that performed by boards of examiners shifted gradually until more than half of all job placements were being made as a result of Commission examining.

The emergency nature of the staffing problem immediately following World War II is well known to most of us. The civilian branch of Government had grown enormously. Competitive examinations leading to civil service status were not given during the war years. Consequently, we had a tremendous problem of recruiting for current and ongoing needs, as well as of applying competitive examining procedures to the continued staffing of positions occupied by nonstatus personnel.

It was recognized early that the Commission work force was numerically inadequate even to come close to doing the total job. In addition, it was recognized that examining for many occupations required the professional competence of the operational personnel in the particular fields of work. The only solution to this problem was a very

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broad expansion of the board-of-examiners program. New boards were created and the examining jurisdictions of existing boards were expanded. This increased board program resulted in a significant trend toward an ever higher percentage of total placements being made through board examining.

Many of the hundreds of boards that were organized during the immediate postwar period performed truly outstanding service, and many of them still do. The examinations they conduct are frequently of high quality, responsiveness to the specific needs of the board's parent agency is usually prompt, and relatively few errors are made. Most of our problems do not stem from the quality of the effort of individual boards. They stem rather from the fragmented nature of the program as it is carried out through the total system.

As originally conceived, boards of examiners were established to handle the examining operations for positions relatively unique to the parent agencies' missions. Some boards examined for only one or two positions, while others examined for a broad range of positions. As time went on it became necessary to expand the role of the boards to include examining for many of the common-type jobs such as clerk, typist, stenographer, engineer, accountant, etc. Also, it soon became clear that there are very few instances of an occupation that is truly unique to one agency. Even in highly professional and technical occupations, there are typically several Government departments and agencies with important demands for employees with that particular background.

The result of this fragmentation has been confusion—confusion both to potential applicants and to agencies. An applicant for a particular kind of job may, by diligent searching, find that there are many examinations open for that kind of work, each announced by a different board. He then is faced with deciding which to file for—one, two, or all of them. If he files for more than one, he may later be bewildered (understandably so) by receiving, for example, a rating of 76 from one board and an 82 from another. Experience has shown that no two boards can consistently be expected to give identical ratings to the same applicant. As in school, no two teachers grade precisely alike, even though the standards may be the same.

Even more difficulty is encountered by the applicant who wants to consider Federal employment but isn't certain what kind of job he can qualify for. His particular background may well qualify him in a large number of examinations under a wide variety of job titles.

From the agency's viewpoint, this fragmentation causes problems because no agency can meet all its needs by service from any one office—even if it maintains an active board of examiners. The task of knowing where to go for an appropriate list of eligibles has become extremely complex. The search all too frequently ends at a blank

wall—there simply is no appropriate list. The result, of course, is asking for and receiving authority to appoint someone who meets the minimum standards for the job pending establishment of a register. This is the so-called TAPER appointment. Nine thousand of these TAPER appointments were made last year, far more than seems really necessary. Further, the speed and quality of service received from a board frequently seems to vary widely, depending on whether or not the requesting agency is the "host" of the particular board.

THE MODERNIZATION PROGRAM

The Commission, over the past several years, has been looking closely at the total system of examinations, the proliferation of boards, and the fragmentation of examining described above. This searching review resulted in a decision that a change is necessary—a decision made by the Commission after consultation with agencies, employee organizations, and veterans groups, and with the full endorsement of the President.

This decision is to modernize the total recruiting and examining system. The major goals of this modernization are:

- (1) Creation of a network of 65 Interagency Boards of Examiners to supplant the present board structure.*
- (2) Revision of the examination structure itself to insure available lists of eligibles for all vacancies on a much more comprehensive basis than in the past.
- (3) Provision of one-stop information about all kinds of Federal jobs to a much higher proportion of the general public.

WHAT IS AN INTERAGENCY BOARD?

An Interagency Board is comprised of top-level management officials of the Federal establishments within the Board's area of jurisdiction. It will operate through a board of directors elected by and serving as a kind of executive committee of the Board. The Commission's Regional Directors are working closely with agency heads, with the cooperation of Federal Executive Boards or Federal Executive Associations where available, to establish these Boards.

Each Board will be staffed by a full-time executive officer and personnel staffing specialists on the rolls of the Civil Service Commission. The agencies will provide, as they have in the past, professional experts in specific occupations to serve on rating panels and as advisors to the staff on matters pertaining to their specialties. This organization will afford services essential to the task of staffing the agencies within its geographic area with quality people.

*The Post Office Boards of Examiners are not to be incorporated at present into the Interagency Board network pending further joint study with the Post Office Department.

Each Interagency Board will be a link in a nationwide network of Interagency Boards and the facilities and services of all the Boards will be available to each agency through the Board of which it is a member. The appointing or requesting officer of the agency will always know where to turn for service regardless of the type of position he may want to fill. The executive officer of the Board of which he is an active participating member will become deeply involved in the total placement needs of his participating agencies, and will bring to bear factual knowledge of the network facilities in making the resources of the entire network of Interagency Boards available to the agency.

A wide variety of flexibilities are being built into the Interagency Board system to ensure that this kind of service is, in fact, provided. Where necessary to meet service needs, a local office of an Interagency Board can be established at a location away from the headquarters city. Agency officials can be designated as special examiners to carry out designated parts of the examining function at the agency site. Lists of eligibles can be decentralized, in whole or in part, to meet recurring staffing needs at distant locations. In the absence of eligibles available for particular jobs at particular locations, various short-cut examining devices are available or will be developed to avoid the need for noncareer appointments.

The total Interagency Board network is financed by the participating agencies, with the amount of payment dependent upon number of accessions and the employee population of the agency. Thus, agencies will be putting their resources into the Interagency Board structure on an equal-sharing basis, instead of individually financing their own separate single-agency boards, or, as has been true in a few cases, drawing on the facilities of other agency boards while maintaining none of their own.

EFFECT ON AGENCIES

The Interagency Board with its one-stop service capability, is an extension of the staffing machinery of the agencies which it serves. It has the capacity, knowledge, and interest to become deeply involved with an agency in its staffing activities. Through closer coordination of planning and activities with the Board, an agency will reap numerous benefits through the association in terms of high quality of eligibles available to it and immediate response to its needs. Agencies, of course, will still retain their primary responsibilities for their own staffing—both by identifying and forecasting staffing needs as far in advance as possible and, equally important, by intensive, personalized recruiting campaigns to encourage a large number of highly qualified competitors to apply for the specific job the agency needs to fill.

The centralization of examining activities into 65 Interagency Boards will *not* mean that each of the new Boards will announce examinations and establish lists of eligibles for every kind of job filled within its geographical area.

It is expected that each Interagency Board will have lists of eligibles for all jobs where the labor market is typically local in nature. However, for jobs with a naturally broader area of recruitment, other arrangements will be made. Entry-level and higher-level professional, administrative, and technical positions particularly require a broader base for recruitment to ensure the opportunity of choice of the best qualified from among a large number of applicants. Many such jobs can be best filled on a national basis; others from broad regional areas; etc.

Detailed plans for this important step in modernizing the examination system are still being developed. Basically, however, our objective is to group together into a single examination related positions for which the recruiting sources and qualification requirements are similar, rather than to examine separately for each such position. Under this method, applicants may be considered for several positions for which they qualify rather than only one or two. Also, the network facilities of the Interagency Boards eventually will permit an applicant to be considered for positions in geographic areas other than that in which he has applied, if he so desires.

The most obvious benefit to the public derived from Interagency Boards is the opportunity to obtain from a single source information on job opportunities available. Previously information of this type was often available only from the agency involved and it was necessary for an applicant to contact all agencies in which he would be interested in working to learn of opportunities. Also, there was no local source of information on jobs in other parts of the country. The Interagency Boards, by making this information more easily accessible to the public, will be both helping to improve quality of eligibles through increasing the number of applicants, and meeting the Government's responsibilities in guaranteeing equal employment opportunity to the public.

MOVING AHEAD

We have discussed in this article the Interagency Board as it will exist when the system has undergone its full transition. But, by necessity, the transition is to be a gradual one. Services being rendered by the present boards must not and will not be interrupted. The Interagency Board program is the result of long and careful planning with every consideration given to the necessity of continuing, without interruption or compromise, the services being provided under the present board system.

The continuing transition will see the gradual assumption of examining and related responsibilities until, by the end of 1967, the Interagency Board network is expected to be fully operational and will be meeting the highest standards of service to both the Federal community and the public.

The AWARDS STORY



(USMC photo)

WHY AN AWARDS PROGRAM

—Excerpts from an address by CSC Executive Director Nicholas J. Oganovic at the Civil Service Employee-of-the-Year Awards luncheon, Philadelphia, Pa., January 26, 1966.

◆ SURVEYS MADE by the behavioral science people invariably show that "recognition for good work" is ranked high in importance when employee attitudes are surveyed. For example, Dr. Frederick Herzberg of Western Reserve University found that "recognition for good work" ranked number two in his research study reported in his book *The Motivation to Work*. More recently a research study by Texas Instruments Corporation, reported in the Harvard Business Review of January 1964 under the title "Who Are Your Motivated Workers?" again showed "earned recognition" as ranking second among all of the factors influencing favorable attitudes by the employee.

A positive action program to grant distinctive recognition at the time it is earned is the basic purpose of the awards program. We need to make positive use of the awards program particularly with our people at the lower and middle grade levels where their work is often routine, where they don't have the intense challenge faced by a research scientist, where they don't have the stimulating

variety of work that managers and many professional staff experience. The work at these lower levels is just as important. The mission of the agency won't get done effectively without spirited and enthusiastic interest at all levels.

We want to use this program to encourage our people to be cost conscious, to be alert to bottlenecks and operating problems and constructive ideas for their solution, to use their initiative, and to have a never-ending commitment to search for improvement.

THERE ARE MANY FACTORS that foster the all-too-common bureaucratic attitude of "play it safe—don't do anything new or different." One of these factors is a widespread tendency on the part of employees to accept at face value such statements of the oldtimers as: "Well, it has always been this way. Someone must want it done that way and, by gosh, that is the way we're going to do it."

But do we actually want our employees to follow like sheep—or to be two-legged mice following the pied piper down the old roadways that get worn out and lead to waste, inefficiency, and obsolescence? Of course we don't. But are we doing enough to forestall it?

If we tune in our radio sets on the employee channel, we would probably keep hearing employees say to one another: "They ought to do this, and they ought to do that, and if they would only do this." Unfortunately, in many cases the employee is reluctant to pass his idea on to "they." Consequently, the problem never gets solved. This is one reason we need active employee suggestion programs so that the employee knows it is customary to pass his idea on to management as a suggestion. This gets the problem out on the table where it can be solved.

The General Electric Company has a slogan that I like: "Progress is our most important product." We ought to have a slogan like this. Perhaps we would have to modify it a little and say "Progress is one of our most important products." But we do need this kind of commitment to progress and improvement.

EVERYBODY KNOWS that our first-line supervisors, and our middle management, are very busy people. They are often so immersed in the daily pressure of getting out the work and meeting the deadlines that they don't have time to think about progress and improvement.

Even worse, the pressure of daily work sometimes causes them to react unfavorably when an employee suggests an improvement. It is all too human and too easy to say to the employee, "Don't bother me with that now—I've got to get this work out by 5 o'clock." When this happens, employee initiative and the spirit of progress go down the drain. To offset this human tendency, perhaps we need a commitment that every supervisor at the end of the year will be required to show some employee-initiated improvements in his operations.